Questions matter

Notes and guidance: When and how to deliver Project Qualifications

Support from us

Our Projects team and an appointed Adviser will support you. Your Adviser is available every day and will answer questions from the Coordinator via email, usually within 48 hours. All Advisers are highly experienced moderators of the Project Qualifications. It's helpful, for example, to have someone to discuss your proposed delivery model or Taught Skills programme with. The Projects team are available via email and telephone and in addition to providing support for many areas of Project Qualifications, are able to find answer from a number of experts in Projects Qualifications at AQA.

Launching projects in your centre

Now you know about all the various aspects of a Project Qualification you should feel ready to launch, but before you launch your project programme, think carefully about how it can be best fitted into the time that you have available.

We suggest that you prepare a timeline with various crucial final deadlines, this will help both students and supervisors. Be clear at your launch that these are final deadlines and that students will have complete autonomy; if they want to work hard to get ahead of the deadlines, they may.

For example, consider a centre entering in November of Year 13. A potential set of deadlines might look like this:

- all proposals handed into the Centre Coordinator by February half-term
- all mid-project reviews completed before the end of the Summer term
- all products finally completed by mid-September
- all presentations completed by the end of September
- final hand-in date for completed projects is, say, October 7th.

This would allow two weeks for assessment and internal moderation combined and two weeks for the student appeal process before the November 5th deadline for marks to be received by AQA.

When planning delivery of the Taught Skills element, remember that around half of the skills required by students should be taught to them before they submit a project proposal.

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Delivery models

There are many ways in which you can choose to deliver the qualification(s) and depending on your individual circumstances your staffing and timetabling model may look very different to another centre. For the Extended Project (Level 3) there are two possible points of entry each year, November and May. For Levels 1 and 2 there is a single entry point in May.

As an example, you may decide to timetable both the Taught Element and supervision time for the EPQ throughout Year 12 only, so that students complete their projects by the end of Year 12 and enter in November of Year 13. This has the advantage of timetabling individual Supervisors for a full academic year. However, most centres recognise the benefit of entering EPQ students in May of Year 13, giving the students the opportunity to develop academic maturity that can be reflected in their project.

A common model involves the timetabling of the EPQ from January of Year 12 through to December of Year 13. This gives students time to settle into sixth form life before embarking on their project. In this model, staff would be timetabled throughout the academic year and as one cohort finishes, a new cohort starts. Inevitably there might be some changes of Supervisor (eg as Supervisors move jobs in September), but these changes can be easily managed if there are good records of supervision.

Ultimately the delivery model and centre set up is entirely up to you. For some centres, a timetabled time allowance given to members of staff covers both skills teaching (the Taught Element) and supervision, so that each timetabled student group, in terms of delivery, is discrete and complete. In other centres, the Taught Element is delivered entirely by the Centre Coordinator, thus the timetabled time for supervisors is used exclusively for the one-to-one supervision of students.

Generally, it works well to have Supervisors working with groups of students, but it's possible to have a different Supervisor for every student entered. However, it must be noted that where a large number of Supervisors are working in a centre, the internal moderation of the Supervisor assessments of the completed Projects will become much more demanding. (See *Notes and guidance: Assess the Project Qualifications* for details about internal moderation).

It's up to you to decide how much time a Centre Coordinator and Project Supervisors should be allocated. Centre Coordinators will need time for management, administration and quality assurance. Supervisors need time to supervise each student. Time must also be allocated for the delivery of the Taught Element. Typically, a Supervisor with a group size of between 6 and 10 students might expect to be allocated one hour per week for supervision. If the same Supervisor is also asked to deliver the Taught Element then two hours per week might be suitable. However, if the Taught Element is delivered by the Centre Coordinator then this time, alongside the time required for management, will be required by the Centre Coordinator. The management time required by the Centre Coordinator will depend on the number of students and Supervisors that they have to manage.

As already mentioned, entry points for the EPQ are November and May, but delivery duration can be as long or short as preferred by you. For example, if your students have limited other

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academic work to undertake, the required 30 hours of teaching and 90 hours of independent input could be completed in a half term.

Delivery to large cohorts

Where large numbers of students are embarking on Project Qualifications, the Centre Coordinator's role is especially important. It will also be appropriate to recruit some Assistant Coordinators. These will be experienced supervisors who each take responsibility for approving a set of project proposals and who play a leading role during internal moderation.

The Centre Coordinator will need to monitor the work of the Assistant Coordinators but by having a team involved, especially at proposal stage, students should not have to wait long to receive approval of their proposals. There'll be wisdom and advice available to support Supervisors; Supervisors could be allocated to an Assistant Coordinator team so that a pyramid support system operates.

The time required for approval and for internal moderation of a large number of projects should not be underestimated.

Remote delivery

It's possible to deliver Project qualifications either partially or wholly using remote delivery. If you find that option would suit your centre, here are some suggestions to help you with successful delivery.

- Hold a group video call with your students to make sure that the demands and requirements of the qualification are fully understood. You can use Hodder's Session 1: Introduction to the EPQ PowerPoint to support this call.
- Ask students to write a paragraph saying why they believe a Project qualification is appropriate for them and send this to you by email. They may already have some ideas about a project topic, but at this stage it's an understanding of the qualification and commitment to independent project work that's required.
- Establish clear and agreed communication methods for your students and supervisors for updates, individual meetings and group teaching. Make sure that all those interactions that usually happen in and around school/college are considered in the virtual learning environment. Ensure safeguarding is fully considered when remote communication tools and methods are decided.
- Consider how to manage files and digital media created for Project work. You could use services like ProjectQ, Google Docs or Teams, or an agreed method of file management using your own school systems. Make sure your students and supervisors have access to the right documents and know how to manage their work online.
- Use the training course materials available via Centre Services to provide online training to your projects team. This includes ensuring everyone is working to the JCQ guidelines and knows how their role fits into the Project programme.
- Researching at home, or in a remote environment, poses particular challenges and must be taken into account when selecting a topic. Your supervisors should question their students about the proposed research and its feasibility. Reject a topic if resources can't be accessed.

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Practical resources for artefact creation may be less likely to be available if your students are working at home, or their usual school/college spaces are unavailable to them. The opportunities for objectively 'testing' completed artefacts may be reduced. The Centre Coordinator must be alert to this and be prepared to reject a proposal if they think the tools to successfully develop the artefact won't be available.
Even without access to university, school or public libraries students should be made aware of the academic resources that are available. For example:

- JSTOR
- DOAJ
- The British Library

Student proposal, supervisor comments and coordinator approval

Careful consideration must be made to the student's working arrangements and access to their proposed body of research, to ensure the remote execution of a project is feasible and the project proposal enables the student to target the full set of Assessment Objectives.

Planning, mid-project and project product reviews

Each of these three important review meetings can be conducted online and documented in the Production Log in the normal way. Your students and Supervisors will need to consider how they tackle online meetings and how to best prepare to make the most of their time together. For example, it might be a good idea for the student to share any relevant documents with the Supervisor prior to the meeting, but remember that the supervisor is there to provide support and guidance only. The Supervisor should not mark/annotate any work, nor should they give specific advice on structure or content.

It's a good idea to remind students and supervisors about the level of feedback allowed, especially in remote learning circumstances where face-to-face dialogue may be replaced with written exchanges.

At the mid-project review, the student will confirm the final title and form of their project product. This gives the student the opportunity to address any issues related to how remote learning has impacted on the final title and project product. For example, perhaps the student has modified their final title, or adjusted the focus of their research based on the availability of research sources.

It's expected that by the project product review the student will send their supervisor a draft of their project report. It's important that any feedback on this report is at a general level only and whilst it might be written, feedback must not be recorded on the report itself, instead written in an email where video or voice calls aren't available.

Presentation parts A and B

A remote presentation may be delivered to an invited non-specialist audience. Provided the presentation is delivered live and a Q&A session is recorded by the supervisor, the full specification requirements can be met. If video is not possible, presentation materials can be posted or emailed to the audience in advance of the presentation day and telephone delivery

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may be used. Your students may exercise creativity and ingenuity to deliver exciting presentations that tell the story of the challenges met and overcome during their journey.

Reflection

In addition to the usual reflections relating to strengths and weaknesses discovered during the journey, remote delivery offers your students opportunities to reflect on the many additional challenges posed. Perhaps they'll evaluate the different online platforms for communication; why, for example, do they prefer use of one platform over another? They could reflect on the limits presented by reduced access to a wider range of resources or how they feel about working remotely.

Because the project has been delivered remotely, it's expected that the Production Log and project product (written report or artefact and written report) will be available electronically. If any part of the project is not available in this way the supervisor must make adequate arrangements to view the full project submission so marking can take place. We'll accept electronic signatures for all paperwork related to the project.

Troubleshooting

Dual accreditation

A student cannot achieve an award for a Project qualification if it overlaps in content with material that will be taught to them during their Level 3 studies. During the initial stage of the project process, pre-proposal, Supervisors should communicate with relevant members of the teaching staff to ensure that any topic proposed by a student offers genuine scope to develop and extend beyond the specification content of any Level 3 subject that the student is studying. A very clear statement must be written at Proposal stage by the Supervisor, to reassure that thorough checking for potential dual accreditation has been undertaken. A Centre Coordinator can only approve proposals where the possibility of dual accreditation has been eliminated.

Supervisors need to be aware of any change of direction that a student's research takes post proposal. A carefully scrutinised proposal might be approved with confidence that there is no risk that the student will fall foul of dual accreditation, but the student's research journey might bring the research focus back to a topic that will be taught as part of the student's Level 3 studies. Supervisors have the responsibility to ensure that this does not continue. If a project is found to have fallen foul of dual accreditation an award in the Project Qualification cannot be achieved.

Retention of students

Student drop-out is reported by some centres as an issue with respect to Project Qualifications. There are a number of ways that might be considered to combat this.

- Only have fully committed Supervisors working in the Projects team; sometimes a lack of enthusiasm from a Supervisor for the qualification can result in a student also losing enthusiasm.

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- Operate an application procedure: students need to demonstrate a real understanding of the qualification and the independent working that will be required of them before being accepted on the course.
- With the support of the SLT, fully embed the Project Qualification within the curriculum, so it is not seen to be an optional extra.
- For EPQ, encourage students to contact HE providers to be reassured that the project will be considered to be of value within a UCAS application.
- Ask alumni students who have moved on to HE to come back and deliver a talk explaining how undertaking Projects has given them a head start at university.

Selecting Supervisors

One of the issues most frequently encountered by centres is an uneven level of enthusiasm from Supervisors. It is not helpful to students to have 'reluctant' supervisors drafted into this role as a timetable filler. If a supervisor lacks enthusiasm for their role, it will inevitably be the student who suffers. Centre Coordinators must provide Supervisors with strong support in terms of training and resources. A fair time allocation for supervision of students is highly recommended. Supervisors play such a vital role within the qualification(s) and their confidence in performing this role is essential.

Avoiding disruption at change of Supervisor

Centre Coordinators must manage any change of supervisor as smoothly as possible so that the student feels fully supported throughout their project process. A careful handover should be arranged with detailed supervision notes as well as a less formal verbal transfer of Supervisor information. The change of Supervisor and the point at which it occurred should be noted on the Record of marks page in the concluding comments.

Piggy-backing a Project Qualification onto another activity

Work experience, Nuffield placements or similar programmes provide an excellent opportunity for a student to use advanced facilities. However, it is important that both Supervisor and student understand that an organised placement project cannot be turned into an Extended Project. What can be highly successful however is the use of a placement as a springboard, providing inspiration for a student's own individual project. For example, a highly prized Nuffield placement during the summer vacation following Year 12 may inspire the commencement of an individual student's project that commences in September of Year 13.

Students taking part in an award programme or competition may want to take this as a starting point for their project. But beware that if the competition or programme brief is tightly prescribed it may prevent students taking their own decisions (Assessment Objective 3) or undertaking independent research. It is better to undertake a Project qualification first and once the Project qualification has been awarded, aspects of the Project may be used by the student to fulfil a competition or programme brief. For example, complete an Extended Project in Year 12 and then using the report to enter for a Crest Award in Year 13. (See *Notes and guidance: Work with third parties on Project Qualifications*).

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Avoiding ethically unsuitable projects

The use of a student ethics committee has great merit. This activity needs to be supervised to ensure that:

- students understand the ethical principles involved
- the Supervisors/Centre Coordinator can use the outcomes to inform their judgement regarding the suitability of student proposals.

The ethics committee is formed of EPQ student peers whose job is to ensure each proposal is ethically sound prior to submission. Students take it in turns to present their project proposals and answer questions posed by their peers. Below are some suggested questions for students to select and adapt.

Generic questions for all proposals

- How do you think your research findings could be beneficial to others?
- Does your research have the potential to inform others about different cultures or help overcome prejudice and misunderstanding between different groups?
- Have you considered the applications of your research and to what extent are you able to influence its outcomes?
- What qualifies you to undertake this research?
- How have you taken any health and safety issues into account?
- Give an example of how you'll respect views different from your own.

Questions for research using human participants

- How will you ensure that all participants are fully informed about the research before they decide to take part?
- How will you protect the confidentiality of participants and make sure that the experience of participation is a positive one for them? What will they get out of it?
- How will you ensure that your participants can withdraw at any stage and that they have the chance to see and influence the way you have used their input?
- How will you ensure all participants are fully debriefed after the research stage?

Questions for socially sensitive research into controversial topics

- On balance, why do you think the outcomes of this research outweigh any potential for harm or unsettling others?
- If you're aiming to bring about some positive change, how will you ensure your actions actually make a positive difference?
- If you're using live models or participants in your artefact/presentation how will you protect them and ensure the experience is positive for them.
- If you're using online research tools for surveys or creating blogs, websites or social media then how will you protect the safety of your participants and yourself?

Potential issues at presentation

Supervisors should be prepared for questions coming from the audience. Pre-prepared questions from friends or family should not be recorded in Presentation part B of the Production Log. Whilst it is perfectly acceptable for students to ask friends or family to help

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them prepare by holding a practice Q and A session, the live Q and A must involve unseen and unprepared questions and answers.

Supervisors are advised to always have an impartial adult in the audience to act as a witness to proceedings to avoid an unwitnessed challenge from a student to a supervisor's account of the presentation.

Avoiding appeals

Centres should inform students wishing to appeal their mark that students will need to explain on what grounds they wish to request a review of an internally assessed mark (see Notes and guidance: Assess the Project Qualifications for details on the student review request). Centres may rule out complaints regarding the quality of supervision at this review stage since the review must focus on the quality of work submitted. Having reviewed the copies of materials made available to them, the student will need to explain what they believe the issue to be.

By providing detailed comments in the record of marks, identifying clearly the evidence that supports the marks awarded, centres will reduce the possibility of appeal. This possibility will be reduced further if robust internal moderation is clearly evidenced.

Further support

- Centre Services can be accessed via a secure login (your exams officer can set up an account for you if needed) and contains the following resources for Project Qualifications:
    - standardisation materials and examiner commentaries
    - examiner reports
    - training materials – resources from past training courses for projects including resources for supervisor and coordinator training.
- Email projects@aqa.org.uk for further support.
- To learn who your dedicated Project Adviser is, contact projects@aqa.org.uk
- There's an AQA approved textbook available for the EPQ. The publisher has also provided, free of charge, various PowerPoint presentations together with a Scheme of Work to help you get the best use out of the textbook.

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